

A Friendship of Words: Philology and Prophecy in Hölderlin's "Rousseau"

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Taking its departure from Norbert von Hellingrath's interpretation of the significance of Rousseau for Friedrich Hölderlin, the following paper argues, through a close reading of the poem "Rousseau," that Hölderlin, contra Hellingrath, conceives of his relation to Rousseau in philological rather than prophetic terms. Looking closely at the complexities of Hölderlin's manuscript while contrasting the philological approaches of Freidrich Beißner's *Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe* and D. E. Sattler's *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, I demonstrate that an explicitly philological moment is inscribed into the text of the poem itself, and that it addresses its reader as a specifically philological reader, while at the same time seeking to establish a "friendship of words" with Rousseau's prophetic utterance.

Keywords: Hölderlin, Rousseau, philology, prophesy, friendship, temporality, history

In his 1970 students' edition of Hölderlin's collected poetry, Detlev Lüders, commenting on the ode "Rousseau," cites the following passage from Norbert von Hellingrath's historical-critical edition without further comment, as if its truth stood beyond question. "Rousseau ist für Hölderlin," Hellingrath writes, "der Genius, besonders der einsame Seher kat exochen [. . .], und damit Träger seiner eigenen Empfindungen, beinahe nur ein anderer Name für Hölderlin" (Hölderlin/Lüders 189). Hellingrath was certainly prescient in recognizing the need for greater research into Hölderlin's relation to Rousseau; he indeed considered it crucial for reconstructing a pan-European concept of Romanticism (Hölderlin/Hellingrath 4: 327; *Cf.* de Man 19). Yet if one pays more than passing attention to this passage, its strangeness soon becomes evident: Hölderlin's poetry, it is claimed, is not mere poetry, serving certain social or aesthetic or even intellectual ends, nor even just a work of genius in the more ordinary sense, but a manner of prophetic speech, issuing from the solitude of the one who does not belong to his or her own time; the seer who can see past his own time and into another age. Yet the very role of the prophet – of a certain radical originality and untimeliness – has itself been borrowed from Rousseau, whose own prophetic solitude is imitated through an act of almost perfect identification.

Hellingrath's remark might appear as nothing more than a typical manifestation of the enthusiasms that continue, till this day – and on both sides of the ideological spectrum – to play a role in Hölderlin's reception. Yet it also brings into focus a constellation of motifs that have exerted considerable influence on the interpretation of Hölderlin and that are instructive precisely because they touch at, even if catastrophically misrecognizing, a moment very crucial to his work. This moment is the philological. Hellingrath himself is, of course, justly famed as the first great Hölderlin-philologist; the critical edition that he initiated, and that his untimely death kept him from finishing, laid the foundation for the extraordinary scholarship of the following decades, preparing the way for Friedrich Beißner's *Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe* and D. E. Sattler's *Frankfurter Ausgabe*. Yet for all the philological rigor with which Hellingrath approaches Hölderlin's texts, he understands philology for the most part merely as the means for recovering the "pure word" of the text. He does not yet regard philology as that which, being inscribed into the text in its composition rather than arising from the vicissitudes of its transmission and reception, is itself integral to the text, and indeed has an intimate and complex relation to its untimeliness and prophetic potential.

The following paper aims to explore precisely this connection between philology and prophetic untimeliness that exists in the work of Friedrich Hölderlin, focusing on the unfinished poem "Rousseau." This poem, which will be approached with a view to the philological challenges that it presents, is not Hölderlin's most difficult or enigmatic. Composed around 1800, it stands at the threshold of the period in which Hölderlin's greatest poems would be written. But it nevertheless puts in sharp relief the complex interaction between the prophetic register and a philological mode of reading, indeed a provocation of the reader toward philology, that is inscribed into the text.

Before turning to "Rousseau," it will be useful to say a few words about the concept of philology and clarify my own use of the term. The philological moment in Hölderlin does indeed have much to do with the traditional practices of textual curatorship that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht defends in *The Powers of Philology* – practices that were crucial to Hölderlin's revival and canonization in the twentieth century. Yet philology will also be taken at once more broadly and more literally: not only as the tenacious, meticulous care and study of the written word, nor as another name for literary scholarship and criticism as such, but indeed as a love and friendship for the word and for language that rivals philosophy as that other "intellectual" love, the love of wisdom. While this last sense of philology is perhaps never completely out of play in its long and complex history, it is above all within the last two and a half centuries that language, conceived in the singularity of its historical and textual manifestations and in its structural irreducibility to pure *a priori* rationality, has offered itself as the site where a new kind of knowledge and experience, deeper and more radical than the reason of the philosophers and yet rigorous in its own way, would be possible. Sometimes this turn to language has taken place as a transformation of philosophy itself, or has at

least been appropriated without too much difficulty to its disciplinary practices. Yet in other instances – and most notably in Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, Peter Szondi, Werner Hamacher, and Giorgio Agamben – it has attached itself, if sometimes only in passing, not only to the name of philology but also to its practices.

Philology is, however, not only a rival of philosophy but also of philosophy's own more familiar rival: prophetic revelation. So long as revelation assumes the form of scripture, philology becomes necessary as a means for accessing religious truth. Yet left to its own devices, philology has tended to unsettle the claims of revelation. At the same time, once it begins to present itself explicitly as a rival to philosophy, philology enters into a fraught, complex, and perilous alliance with prophetic registers: seeking to find a truth in the text that cannot be reduced to the pure reason of the philosophers, it tends to treat secular texts as if sacred, turning them into a counterfeit prophesy. This tendency, as already witnessed in Hellingrath and Lüders, is seldom so evident than in the reception of Hölderlin's poetry. Because Hölderlin at once invokes prophetic registers – indeed operates at a plane that has little to do with the aesthetic and didactic values by which poetry has traditionally been understood – and at the same time poses tremendous challenges for scholarship at every level, the philological labors invested in his work tend to add to its "sacred" aura, transforming it into a kind of scripture. The danger of Hellingrath's Hölderlin-philology, and indeed of any reading that neglects the ways in which the philological complicates the prophetic, is that, for all its philological labors, it will end up dissolving the philological into the prophetic, and treating the former as a means and conduit to the latter. Poetic, "secularized" prophesy, in this way, simply takes the place of philosophy as the source of foundational truths. For just this reason it is so important not only to read Hölderlin philologically but also to attend to the philological moment that is *in* Hölderlin, indeed inscribed into the poetic text. This moment not only challenges the claims of philosophy but at the same time also complicates the prophetic register that emerges, above all in poetry, as soon as philosophy has itself been neutralized. Projected into the future as a summons to the philologist-reader, and indeed as the summons to a kind of friendship of words, the philological moment in Hölderlin resists every prophetic interpretation that would come too soon, seeking to cash out the value of prophesy in a present moment that must still be foreseeable from the vantage point of the past and, hence, continuous with the past. It is, in other words, that which rends the fabric of eschatological time, rendering it discontinuous, by folding it back upon the fabric of the text.

Because the philological moment in Hölderlin is inscribed into his poetry, we must approach it by way of the conflict between different philological approaches to which his manuscripts have given rise. Rather than privileging one single approach, I will make use of both of the two principal modern critical editions of Hölderlin's writings: the *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, which was begun by Friedrich Beißner in 1943, and the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, which was initiated by D. E. Sattler in 1972. These two editions, which will be identified with the

respective abbreviations *GSA* and *FA*, follow strikingly different editorial procedures: whereas Beißner presents a single constituted text, relegating alternate readings to a companion volume, Sattler seeks, through an innovative and remarkable editorial apparatus together with the inclusion of facsimiles of the manuscript pages, to foreground both unresolvable ambiguities and the process of composition itself.

The constituted text of the second version (constituted text II in the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*) of “Rousseau” may be divided into three sections. The first (stanzas 1–4) evokes in very general and suggestive terms the “tragic” dimension of Rousseau’s fate; the second (stanzas 5–6) uses the image of the tree to urge Rousseau to contentment; and the third (stanzas 7–10) offers a new, affirmative, interpretation of Rousseau’s life. The first section reads:

Wohl eng begränzt ist unsere Tageszeit.
Du warst und sahst und stauntest, und Abend ists.
Nun schlafe wo unendlich ferne
Ziehen vorüber die Völkerjahre

Und mancher siehet über die eigne Zeit
Ihm zeigt ein Gott ins Freie, doch sehnend stehst
Am Ufer du, ein Aergerniß den
Deinen, ein Schatten, und liebst sie nimmer,

Und jene, die du nennst, die Verheißenen,
Wo sind die Neuen, daß du an Freundeshand
Erwarmst, wo nahn sie, daß du einmal
Einsame Rede, vernehmlich seiest?

Klanglos ists armer Mann, in der Halle dir,
Und gleich den Unbegrabenen, irrest du
Unstät und suchest Ruh und niemand
Weiß den beschiedenen Weg zu weisen. (FA 5: 787)

These lines would seem to present the kernel of a prophetic poetics that appropriates the traditional Christian understanding of John the Baptist as the prophet who, coming in advance of Christ, initiates the messianic event. Rousseau’s words, words that promise to ground a new world, cannot yet take root because they lack the community capable of hearing and understanding them. The prophetic word cannot but remain in a state of ongoing hesitant *staunen* at the limit that separates the existing world from the future. According to Grimm’s German dictionary, *staunen* corresponds to the Latin *stupere*, which can mean “to be astonished or amazed at,” “to wonder at,” but also simply “to be struck senseless” (Bartz et al.). The prophet has been left immobilized, and perhaps it is not the prophet’s words but only his sacrifice that could make it possible to move on and institute a new order of things.

Yet we at the same time see that if, for Hellingrath, this prophetic interpretation of Hölderlin might justify the latter in his own identification with Rousseau, and hence also with John the Baptist as the prophet of the coming divinity, the basis of interpreting Hölderlin's poetry prophetically is perhaps nothing else than another highly problematic, if seemingly natural and justifiable, substitution: Hölderlin is identified with, and takes the place of, Hölderlin's *Rousseau-bild*. This substitution and identification, moreover, presupposes a certain understanding of the nature of poetic address: namely that one poet only addresses the other in an act of identification, as if *true* poets could only ever speak of themselves and their experiences, or perhaps of poetry itself. Thus Rousseau's loneliness, and by extension also Hölderlin's, becomes the effect of a method of interpretation that reads its own premises into the work and rejoices in those works that confirm what it already knows.

The rest of the poem, however, suggests that Hölderlin names Rousseau precisely in order to correct this deeply rooted presupposition. Rather than reproducing Rousseau's loneliness, it corrects this loneliness by correcting the understanding of language from which it issues. To make sense of this complex strategy, we must first observe that Rousseau's lonely speech is anything but the impressionistic and vague appropriation of the cult of Rousseau. It has a specific, precise reference, invoking the first lines of Rousseau's "Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire," a text that is implicated throughout Hölderlin's poem, and which was among those of Rousseau's that Hölderlin had most likely read (Link 25). Indeed, as Paul de Man claims, it would later become "for Hölderlin Rousseau's most revealing text" (25). The first "walk" begins:

Me voici donc seul sur la terre, n'ayant plus de frère, de prochain, d'ami, de société que moi-même. Le plus sociable et le plus aimant des humains en a été proscrit par un accord unanime. [So here I am, alone on the earth, no longer having a brother, neighbor, friend, or society but myself. The most social and loving of human beings has been proscribed from society by a unanimous agreement.] (Rousseau 33; my translation)

Rousseau's "lonely speech" is lonely in at least two ways: not only because it has failed to find the community of listeners that could belong to it but also because it is a speech that declares loneliness, or indeed calls, in a rather intimate way ("voici"), for the reader to bear witness to Rousseau's being alone. If the paradox here is all too obvious, it at once supports and gainsays the loneliness of the speech: if the speech cannot be lonely, since it has the reader as its most intimate companion, it still also must remain lonely, as this very contradiction withdraws the conditions of its comprehension.

The loneliness of Rousseau's speech, we might even say, is the loneliness of speech and conversation itself: of the voice that, trying to become perfectly intimate with itself so as to communicate its own most intimate self with the other, discovers, through a dialectic familiar both to Hölderlin and the Early Romantics,

an absolute distance from itself, since the very act of self-reflection, which would guarantee perfect self-presence, makes the self all too painfully aware of the absolute difference from itself. Yet Hölderlin's "Rousseau" responds to this loneliness – intervening in it, and even in a sense undoing it. Refusing to identify with Rousseau's loneliness and to mimic it by appropriating Rousseau's prophetic stance as its own, it instead challenges an understanding of friendship, sociality, and language rooted in the solitude of subjectivity and the intimate self-presence of the voice. Most telling, in this regard, is the imperative "now sleep." This, again, seems to invoke the *Reveries*: in the second paragraph of the first walk, Rousseau remarks that, even after fifteen years, his condition still seems like a dream (*rêve*), and that he still imagines himself to be dreaming a bad dream (*un mauvais sommeil*), from which he will wake up and find himself with his friends.

If we suppose that the addressee of the poem is not so much Rousseau as Rousseau's words, and indeed the disquiet of words whose paradoxical publication of solitude remains a provocation long after Rousseau's death, then the nature of this imperative could only consist in somehow commanding, authorizing, and enabling sleep by performing the institution of a new relation to language that would, as it were, undo the conditions of this unrest. Indeed, as a word addressed to a word, the imperative "now sleep" already in a certain sense performs the effect that it commands: Rousseau's words can and must sleep for the very reason that, at the moment of this address, they are relieved of their solitude. Whereas Rousseau imagines himself to be sleeping and dreaming badly, and still thinks that he might awaken and find himself with his old friends, Hölderlin orders a different kind of sleep – a good sleep, as it were: a sleep that would lead not away from but toward friends. But this would not be the case if Hölderlin's poem simply assumed the solitude of Rousseau's words as its own. Rather, what is crucial is that the specific nature of the command to sleep involves an extreme of intimacy without identification, since it is precisely the one who will remain awake and vigilant, who has taken the vigil upon himself, who could command the other to sleep. Thus, at the very moment when Hölderlin addresses Rousseau and his words, and the identification of Hölderlin and Rousseau seems absolute, the identification, or at least the identification with the Rousseau who has been named, breaks down. For Hölderlin's word, in the instance of this command, is no longer lonely, and neither is Rousseau's: but the one has addressed the other; a conversation has begun, even if only just begun, and just at the point, on the verge of sleep, where the solitude of the soul threatens to become absolute.

The words that follow this intimate command to sleep, moreover, continue this transformation of sleep – of what would seem to be the most solitary thing – into the space where a certain kind of society, and indeed a new friendship, is possible. For in telling Rousseau, or rather Rousseau's words, *where* to sleep, it also *creates* this location – the space-time of the conversation that passes through and even constitutes the "years of the peoples." Thus Rousseau's reveries, which had insisted above all else on pure solitude as their condition of possibility, are,

through the almost violent imposition of the friendly address of Hölderlin's text, transformed from a dream-time of pure subjectivity (in Kantian terms: the imaginative auto-production of time as the condition of possibility of experience) into the dream-time of a mode of Being that is at once textual and historical.

A second, final imperative, appearing in the beginning of the fifth stanza, complements this first imperative to sleep. This second imperative is peculiar both because it seems to contradict the first and because the addressee is so unclear. Whereas the first imperative forcefully disambiguates between Hölderlin and Rousseau, this second, as will become clear, once again seems to suggest the identity of the two. These ambiguities are further compounded by the extraordinary textual problems that these lines involve. In contrast to the first sixteen lines of the poem, the remainder of the unfinished poem has not yet been brought into a polished Alcaic metre. Yet it is in just this way – through a certain strategy of textual overdetermination – that Hölderlin's "Rousseau" confirms the sense of philology that the first imperative initiates.

The *Stuttgarter* edition, following Hellingrath, reads:

Sei denn zufrieden! (GSA 2:12)

The constituted text (II D) of the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* reads:

So eile denn zufrieden! (FA 5: 787)

The *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, which provides a photographic reproduction of the manuscript together with a typeface transcription on facing pages, casts light on the mystery of these two very different readings. The first imperative ("Sei denn zufrieden!") is never stricken out, and yet above it is written "Nein,!" and above this "Nein,!": "Eile."

The whole appears as follows:

Eile

(Nein,!)[So] (FA 4:230)

The reading "So eile denn zufrieden!" seems in some ways rather violent, even though it does manage to preserve the Alcaic metre. It is possible, indeed, that there are even more ambiguities than the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, despite its extraordinary philological rigor, acknowledges. Ignoring the strict metrical requirements, we could also read the line:

Nein! Eile zufrieden!

This does not completely do justice to the superscription of "Eile" and the underlining of "Nein," but it is, at the very least, less awkward than "So eile denn

zufrieden.” Indeed, we need only elide the “e” to recover the same metrical pattern as “Sei denn zufrieden!”

Nein! Eil’ zufrieden!

Or, again omitting the “Nein!”:

Eile zufrieden!

The point is not that any of these readings is or could be correct. What is striking, though, is that the “Nein!” that precipitates this multiplying of imperatives is itself an imperative, compounding the ambiguity of the address. If it was already unclear whether the addressee of the imperative was Rousseau (or rather his words) or Hölderlin, now a third possibility emerges: the philologist reading Hölderlin’s manuscript and trying to settle on the solid letter that could arise from its errant words. For in the same moment that this “Nein!” would address the poet as the one writing the poem, who speaks to himself in the act of composition, it must also speak to the philologist *as* philologist and no longer simply as reader. And would it not speak at once to neither and both: neither the simple poet nor the simple philologist but the philological poet who cannot evade the demand to *constitute* the words that he reads and passes on to the world as Hölderlin’s own? Hölderlin’s “Nein!,” this is to say, addresses the poet himself, together with his readers, as philologists: it refuses to allow him and them to forget that the poet’s words do not exist as facts in the world with one true interpretation but are imperatives commanding toward a community of friendship that exists, first and last, as the conversant, though always asymmetrical, exchange of such imperatives.

The philological moment in Hölderlin’s poetry involves the convergence of two tendencies, both of which announce themselves through an imperative: if, on the one hand, Hölderlin’s text receives Rousseau’s words philologically, it also inscribes the problematic of philology into the text, refusing to allow it to appear as a mere question of reception and thus demanding of the philological reader that, recognizing her own intention in the production of the text, she abandon the pretense to scientific objectivity. Yet this does not suffice to explain the specific content of the second imperative, which, once read in its philological overdetermination, seems to alternate between rather different meanings, commanding at once to “be content,” and then again, not to “be content” but to “hurry contentedly,” but then again not to “hurry contentedly,” but simply to “be content.” It might seem, indeed, as if Rousseau’s own hesitancy – the hesitancy of the transcendental prophet at the shore – had asserted itself once again. But perhaps these seemingly conflicting imperatives themselves can be rhymed with one another. Perhaps to be a philologist, to enter into the friendship of words, is to pass between “Being” and “rushing” in a way that remains always somehow *zufrieden* – content and at peace.

With this in mind, let us turn to the image of the tree, which follows the second imperative. Here there is no significant discrepancy between the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe* and the constituted text [II D] of the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*:

[So eile denn zufrieden!/Sei denn zufrieden!] der Baum erwächst
 Dem heimatlichen Boden, aber es sinken ihm
 Die liebenden, die jugendlichen
 Arme, und trauernd neigt er sein Haupt.

Des Lebens Überfluß, das Unendliche,
 Das um ihn und dämmert, er faßt es nie.
 Doch lebts in ihm und gegenwärtig,
 Wärmend und wirkend, die Frucht entquillt ihm. (FA 5:787)

The tree seems to provide an image of contentment, and yet it is clear that it is not contentment as usually conceived. It is not the subjective experience of being “at peace” with the things that one has been given. Rather, the nature of contentment in this passage is posed in the most radical terms. On the one hand, the ultimate source of discontent consists not in a lack but in an excess, nor is it the excess of this or that particular thing but rather a fundamental ontological excess, and indeed not as a negative but as a sort of radical positivity. It is the overflowing life, the overflow of life that surrounds the tree. If this becomes the cause of discontent, however, it is not due to its mere presence but to the fact that, perhaps precisely as that which passes beyond every fixed and established order, it cannot be grasped. Rather than being grasped and comprehended, it can only be experienced as the *Dämmerung* between what is and what is not. Every attempt to seize upon its meaning must reduce it to the terms of that which exists. Philosophy tries to grasp the overflow of life and thus becomes hopelessly unsettled. And in the extreme case of the secular, philosophical prophet such as was Rousseau – the prophet of life and Being – it does not just try to prove and deduce but takes a *stand* at the limit between the Being of beings and Non-Being, instituting a new sort of grounding. But then it finds itself always yearning, since it knows that even its own stand opens up a horizon that it cannot stand off from, and that even in some way still remains contained by the limits of the present time. Yearning to hurry away from where it *is*, rushing in deranged imagination away from where it took its stand, it cannot find peace, and not even in the decision to nullify its life: every limit, and even the limit that it imposes upon itself by owning up to its finitude, is “too narrowly limited” (*zu eng begrenzt*) (FA 5: 784).

If the tree in turn is content, it is not because it is not subjected to this overflow but rather because it is able to enter into a relation with this excess without engaging in the ultimately hopeless attempt at comprehension. The tree, after all, does not grasp: it does not have hands with opposable thumbs nor even a mouth and jaws – it has nothing that could take possession of things as property that can be held, used, and given away. It only has roots and branches, which take in

the surplus of life (its expirations and the results of ferment and decay) and *incorporate* them into its own body. They simply live within it, and this life, in turn, brings forth the fruit, which itself, an “overflowing” from the life of the tree, falls to the ground and scatters its seeds. The tree, this is to say, is involved in an ongoing circulation of the surplus of life – it is an ecological economy, as it were. The fruit is the product of this circulation, but it is only provisional; in no way does it exclude itself from the general economy. And what is this fruit that flows forth “gegenwärtig,/ Wärmend und wirkend . . .” if not the flowing forth of the present: the present not as the now in a linear sequence of clock times, nor as the “dream-time” of history, but as the convergence and concretion of the overflowing forces of life into a certain moment of ripeness – a *kairos*, as it is said in Greek – in which they become measured and moderate, full of measured life (*wärmend*) and historical efficacy (*wirkend*). Hölderlin’s philological transformation of the prophetic genre, this suggests, neither simply neutralizes the expectation of fulfillment nor submits it to an infinite postponement – as if anticipating what Agamben, with reference to Derrida, would call a “thwarted messianism” – but, rather, displaces fulfillment into an overflowing, self-transcending, ecstatic immanence (*The Time That Remains* 103). But in just this way, the fulfillment of Rousseau’s prophetic words demands a relinquishing of the prophetic *stance*: the prophet, who stands alone on the shore – at the edge of the world and time of his contemporaries – opposed to the people whom he can no longer love, must become a tree. It is perhaps precisely as the work of a tree-poet that “Rousseau” itself seems to start out as a graft from the ode “An die Deutschen,” or indeed, in Beißner’s words, “branches off” from it (GSA 2: 403).

If this image seems so natural and earthy, we must still remind ourselves that the imperatives of the poem are not so much addressed to Rousseau, or for that matter Hölderlin, as to their words, and that this contentment, in turn, is above all the contentment possible in language, at least in so far as it has abandoned a discursive mode of speech in which language would appear only as the means to communicate thought. We might even recall the words that Hyperion writes to Diotima in Hölderlin’s novel: “Die Sprache ist ein großer Überfluß” (FA 11: 729). The “lesser” overflow is the overflow of life, but the great overflow is language itself. It is in the profusion of words and meanings, of texts and ideals and systems, that the overflow of life finds its extreme expression and not least of all because the linguistic economy, unlike the real circulations of wealth and nutrients and other such life-necessities, is not restrained by a principle of physical limitation. The figure of the tree thus represents, in “a smaller measure,” how the philological poet exists: he does not grasp or ground anything, he is neither philosopher nor prophet, but he takes in the overflowing words that surround him. These in turn live in him, and flow out as fruit, ultimately adding to the ever more overflowing surplus, but meanwhile realizing a momentary measure in (and as) the present. This measure, of which the tree gives a certain example, is the contentment of the poem. It exists between heaven and earth, drawn back to the latter even as it reaches up toward the former. It passes from hurrying to standing and

from standing to hurrying, but it is never harried from one to the other. For indeed it finds itself contained between the two. It is in this way, as this *ho nun kairos* – the ripe time of the present – that the poem *comes to be*; or indeed that Being comes to be out of the excess of language – neither as a futile grasping at the ungraspable nor as the absolute ground but as the confirmation and constancy of poetry. No longer the ground of the text, Being, itself elided within the poem, becomes the space opened up by language that remains to be filled out. To be content is to *be* entirely in the space of the poem, if only in the empty space that has been left over. The poem, much as Agamben will argue in *Stanzas* with regard to poetry in general, appears as a kind of empty space: a lap, womb, or receptacle.

The figure of the tree, drawn from nature and its metabolisms, would seem to exclude both a genuinely historical and a genuinely semiotic dimension, suggesting in turn that whereas the transcendental prophet lives on into the future as a sign awaiting comprehension, the philological poet enjoys a purely natural existence that differs only from the life of vegetation by taking place in the “ideal” medium of language rather than a more “physical” economy. Yet were this so, it would be hard to regard philology as anything more than a retreat from historical existence, with its catastrophes and disappointments, into the bosom of nature. After all the detours and byways of the poem, we would then find ourselves before a very conventional Rousseau: the Rousseau of the garden and an idyllic state of nature. Yet the final four stanzas (stanzas 7–10) suggest that such a reading is untenable. Hölderlin passes back from an imperative to a descriptive mode, speaking once again of Rousseau’s *Rede*. But the *Rede* is different than before: transfigured by friendship and no longer either lonely or futile.

In the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, these lines read:

Du hast gelebt! ge auch dir, auch dir
 Erfreut die ferne Sonne dein Haupt,
 Die Stralen aus der schönern Zeit, es
 Haben die Boten dein Herz gefunden.

Vernommen hast du sie die Sprache der Fremdlinge,
 Gedeutet ihre Seele! Dem Sehnenen war
 Genug der Wink, und Winke sind
 Von Alters her die Sprache der Götter.

Und wunderbar, als hätte von Anbeginn
 Des Menschen Geist, das Werden und Wirken all,
 Des Lebens alte Weise
 schon erfahren

Kennt er im ersten Zeichen Vollendetes schon,
 Und fliegt, der kühne Geist, wie Adler den
 Gewittern, weissagend seinen
 Kommenden Göttern, voraus,

Here we find some crucial deviations from the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe*. To begin with, Beißner compresses the final two lines of the ninth stanza into a single line and omits the adjective “alte,” even though it is clearly written above the crossed-out definite article “die”:

Des Lebens Weise schon erfahren.

Second, following the manuscript precisely, he reads the first line of the eighth stanza:

Vernommen hast du sie, verstanden die Sprache der Fremdlinge,

Sattler, perhaps to avoid such a long and ungainly line, incompatible as it must be with the Alcaic metre, leaves out “verstanden.” Finally, the Stuttgart edition leaves out the “ge” of the first line of the seventh stanza.

This last point is especially significant, since it suggests the radical difference in their editorial approaches. Whereas Beißner seems to read the solitary “ge,” followed by a lacuna, as a problematic remnant of Hölderlin’s yet unfinished creative process that must be left out in order to give the poem a certain, at least relative, finish, Sattler allows it to stand as an extraordinary, if linguistically impossible and poetically awkward, provocation to the reader. The meaning of the “ge,” and the space that follows, remains open. Is it a fragment of a past participle that the poet did not complete, or the necessary omission of what cannot be written? Or is it meant somehow simply to stand alone, drawing attention to the bare quality of *ge*-ness, of “past participiality”? And does it matter that the *Ge-heit* (which is not a *Gewesenheit*), this purely grammatical artifact, cannot be said in any language but German and perhaps its closest cognates – not even in English?

The second to last possibility seems particularly compelling, since it commands the attention of the philological reader to the complex system of tenses that articulate poetic time and experience in the poem. Beginning with the simple past, the poem moves dramatically into the present, and now draws back into the past, yet a different past, expressed through the present perfect. In the final four stanzas the present perfect predominates, and no other past form is used except in one instance – “war” – where the perfect form could only appear tortured. This new past differs from the old above all in that it involves an essentially different relation between the past and the present. Whereas the simple past relegates the past to a narrative that, closed off in its own finitude, can no longer pass over into the present, the perfect relates the completion of the event to the condition of the present, suggesting in effect that the completion of the action itself belongs to the present state of affairs. The simple past, one might say, is inherently *mythic*, whereas the perfect is *historical* in a rich sense: if the former consigns events to an archetypal prehistory to which the present time relates only through analogy, the latter invokes a continuum joining the past with the

present and the future. As the fourth edition of the *Duden Grammatik* explains, the simple past (*das Präteritum*) is used whenever an event or action has been removed from the present and belongs to the past in so far as, at the moment of utterance, it has already happened and is *abgeschlossen* – completed and literally “closed off” (Drosdowski et al. 148).

Moreover: the perfect tense is warm, friendly, conversational, relaxed. If Hölderlin’s previous emphatic use of the simple past in combination with the second-person informal singular *du* had created a jarring tension between narrative distance and dialogical intimacy, this tension now dissolves. As soon as Hölderlin’s imperative called Rousseau, and Rousseau’s words, to friendship, it could no longer address them in the more distanced register of a narrative tense, as if they existed only in the past, but it must speak as if the time of Rousseau’s words were also its own time. For friendship is perhaps above all else this shared time. It is in this light, moreover, that we must understand the “auch dir, auch dir.” The “auch” implies others whom Rousseau is like. But written or spoken by a friend, in the intimacy of a conversation, and without any other context, the first and most obvious other is the friend himself. Hölderlin’s own word, as the friend of Rousseau’s, is reassuring the latter that it too enjoys what the former enjoys (the distant sun, and the rays of the more beautiful time), that they both belong to a present time somehow touched and illuminated by a better time, and that they both have somehow experienced and done the same thing, with this having made them what they now are. But the greatest accomplishment of Hölderlin’s word is to have become friends with Rousseau’s and thus to have become philological. So this, in turn, must be what Rousseau’s word has also done, even if it always seemed, even to itself, as if it were doing something else. But this would mean, in turn, that the seventh, eighth, and ninth stanzas, by telling us what Rousseau has also gone through, develop to an even greater extent than before the meaning of philology.

It might seem as if the poem, with the final four stanzas, returns to the problem of prophesy, and that Hölderlin seeks to reassure Rousseau above all of a certain inevitable efficacy of the prophetic word. The last stanza, with its somewhat triumphal tone and the image of the “coming gods,” seems to confirm such an interpretation. Yet a careful reading suggests that, in the third part of the poem, it is no longer the reception of the poetic word, its finding its proper audience, that matters most. Whereas the poem begins with the image of the frustrated prophesy that cannot find the community through which it would become “vernehmlich” or the friendly hand that would bring it to warmth and life, it ends by affirming that Rousseau’s word had itself “vernommen” the language of the “strangers” (*Fremdlinge*); that it had taken this word, which had reached its heart, into and upon itself – and what else could this mean than befriending what is foreign to it. Rousseau’s word, this is to say, can now itself appear as philology.

The lonely prophet – and what prophet has not been lonely – can never have friends, save perhaps, as in the case of Jesus and John the Baptist,

another prophet, although even here the difference that separates the two seems too great to allow friendship in the more proper sense. He is always outside or above or before, but never with others. Release from loneliness could only come through the community to come. Friendship of itself stands in the way of prophesy: to befriend the prophetic word is not to become its follower and fanatic, to devote oneself to carrying it out, but to complicate, and to a degree neutralize, its prophetic tendencies and become open to it in a different way.

Given that the poem, in the seventh stanza, assumes a more friendly, even casual tone – consider the repetition of “auch dir” or the redundant possessive (“dein Haupt”) – it is perhaps possible that even the apparently unfinished metre could be seen not as mere evidence of the poem’s unfinished status but as a strategic disordering; just as we might even take the poem’s fragmentary nature (is it, after all, itself responding to an unfinished word?) as itself a philological provocation. Thus Beißner’s reading of the eighth stanza, which avoids the awkward “sie die” and in general sounds much more convincing, seems likely:

Vernommen hast du sie, verstanden die Sprache der Fremdlinge,
Gedeutet ihre Seele! Dem Sehnenenden war
Der Wink genug, und Winke sind
Von Alters her die Sprache der Götter. (GSA 2: 13)

This reading, moreover, preserves a subtle correspondence between the first and eighth stanzas. The triad *warst/sahst/stauntest* is replaced with the three past participles *vernommen*, *verstanden*, *gedeutet*. If the former presents the characteristic of a singular prophetic experience leading to the “Unvernehmlichkeit” of the prophetic word, the second, it seems, articulates the essence of the other way, the way of the philologist. Because of the difference in tense, however, this series cannot be read in the same way as the other: it does not consist in a temporal progression of three discrete acts but in three moments or dimensions of the same event that, even if they involve a certain serial order, are nevertheless logically interrelated and interdependent. *Vernehmen* is the act of hearing, of receiving the stranger’s language or word. *Verstehen* is the process of understanding. We understand something when we see how it hangs together with itself and with other things. Understanding is systematic, and thus to understand the word that has been heard means, above all, to develop and cultivate it in such a way that one can stand with it in the present. What is understood becomes the soul or kernel or heart of the word that, having reached our heart, has been heard, and with which we now relate heart-to-heart, becoming bosom friends. *Deuten* here means not just to interpret the soul of language but to point it into another place and time: to show it the way.

It is perhaps already clear from this how well these three words complement each other. *Vernehmen*, while literally transitive, suggests a certain passivity: the one who hears is transformed and changed by what he hears. *Deuten*, by

contrast, is strongly active in meaning: for to interpret something is to transform it in accordance with one's will, exerting our power over that which otherwise resists us in every way (nature, fate, death). *Verstehen*, finally, operates more medially: that which we come to understand transforms us even as we transform it. Yet even more important, though closely related, is that *vernehmen*, *verstehen*, and *deuten* each have a markedly temporal character. The first takes place in the past, the second constitutes the present, and the third points towards the future.

In this way, the triad *vernehmen/verstehen/deuten* would seem to fall back into a more traditionally philosophical discourse. Above all, the centrality of *verstehen* suggests that the two other moments could only take place, and are in this sense subordinated to, an act of understanding which *gives grounds* and ultimately finds the ground of every ground in the present time to which it belongs. Yet the continuation (after "Seele!") of the eighth stanza speaks against such an interpretation. The disindividualizing use of a nominalized present, together with an otherwise unremarkable shift from the perfect to the simple past, opens up a rift between times that interrupts, and indeed breaks away from, the implied presence of *verstehen* and also of the present perfect tense. The addressee of the poem, Rousseau or his word, is now simply "dem Sehnenenden" – the yearning one – with the dative preserving the ambiguity of the address. Yearning begins with absence, and thus the absolute yearning of the one who is only yearning always issues from and returns to the absolute lack of Being, substance, life, and knowledge. In a word, the only ground of yearning is the lack of every ground. But it is for precisely this one, the one who is yearning and who has nothing or not even nothing, that the *Wink* is enough. The one who had or was anything would need more than just a *Wink*: he would need to find something that he could bring in relation to himself, something that he could make his own as the basis of friendship and proximity. But for the one with nothing, the mere beckoning of the stranger towards friendship is enough to become friends. And it is perhaps only in friendship that the *Wink* also becomes a sign and a hint of something more. But this something more is only what the friend can discover as friend. If the friend, in his yearning for friendship, finds everything in the *Wink*, it is neither by realizing his will to power through interpreting what is originally foreign to his own will, nor by somehow finding a common ground for interpretation in that which belongs neither to the one nor the other. What the one finds in the *Wink* as he hears it, understands it, and passes it on, is nothing else than the affinity and friendship of words. This *finding*, however, is anything but a flat and pale tautology. It is not a matter of some abstract "amity," but of a "real" and "concrete," singularly determined and singularly exemplary, friendship. Yet this friendship, in its concreteness, does not belong first of all or simply to the present.

The human spirit – but if we are a conversation, isn't the spirit of humanity language? – knows "im ersten Zeichen Vollendetes schon": to know the first sign of friendship, passed on from "old times," is to know the *full*

friendship of the future. This might suggest something like Plato's doctrine of remembrance, yet the subjunctive in the first line of the previous stanza forbids such a reading. The human spirit did not actually already experience from the beginning "das Werden und Wirken all/ Des Lebens alte Weise," but it is as if it had. The most fundamental, foundational experience – the experience that would ground all other experience – is subjunctive: he experiences only because it is as if he had experienced. Experience is *yearning experience*. This yearning experience is what becomes knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) through the act of understanding, and thus understanding itself is also yearning, desiring, originating from lack.

The last lines of "Rousseau" move from the past to the future:

Und fliegt, der kühne Geist, wie Adler den
Gewittern, weissagend seinen
Kommenden Göttern, voraus,

The bold spirit, likened to the augural eagle, flies *weissagend* (it is, as it were, a winged word) in advance of its coming gods. Here the temptation to see a prophetic moment is greatest, since, with the present participle *weissagend*, Hölderlin seems to identify the spirit with the prophetic spirit that anticipates the new gods who will ground the new historical age. But the emphatic use of *weisen* and *Weise* earlier in the poem suggests that *weissagend* also connotes saying the *Weise*, where the *Weise* is both the way that has been experienced and the path that the *deuten* points into the future.

The deeper connection between *wissen*, *weisen*, *Weise*, and *Weg* appears in the first part of the poem: "und niemand / Weiß den beschiedenen Weg zu weisen." The knowledge that matters the most is knowing how to show the way. This knowledge is lacking because the person who could know is not there. It is tempting to suppose that this person or people do not yet exist, that their time has not yet come. But if the path is the path into the future, and those who could show the way into the future have not yet arrived, then the future itself would be completely unreachable. The nobody, the one who is not yet, is simply the friend, and not a community of hearers that would answer to the prophet's call. Such a community, if it does not yet exist, could never exist. But the way then is of essence the way of the friend, who waves, in a friendly way, into friendship. And, in a way, there is no need to wait for the friend; he does not belong to the future but simply comes with the poem.

The coming gods are perhaps nothing more than the greatest friends, the friends of all who will bind all together in friendship. The spirit of mankind flies in advance of these: it awaits them. But they are not the *realization* of what would be as yet only an ideal of friendship. Every friendship of words, all philology, is already a full friendship, already fully realized, even if, in its fullness, it also points towards others, towards the strangers who must also become friends. Even though the last stanza speaks of and to the future, it remains within the

present tense: the spirit flies, *saying wisdom* and *saying the way*, in advance of the gods who *are coming*. It is not a matter of a future that will arrive *after* the present but rather of what is *now* arriving: an advent and adventure breaking through the present.

But there is one word, above all, that suggests how far Hölderlin has come from the figure of the prophet as it has been understood: *Wunderbar*. What is miraculous is no longer either the revelation of divine truth or the miraculous disruptions of the natural order that would confirm this revelation and cement it into people's minds. Philology is no longer subordinated to a theory of miracles and revelation. Rather: philology, the love of the word for the word, is the miracle.

In this light we might begin to approach Hölderlin's "Patmos," which, together with "Der Einzige," represents his most intense confrontation with the Judeo-Christian tradition, the figure of Christ, and Christian eschatology. In this poem, named after the Aegean island where St. John the Evangelist received his eschatological vision in the *Book of Revelation*, Hölderlin will seem to return the paganized (or rather: re-paganized) prophesy of "Rousseau" to a specifically Christian idiom (Revelation 1:9). If the philological moment that I have tried to discover in my reading of "Rousseau" were merely a passing moment in Hölderlin's development, or perhaps even the mere effect of a forced and violent reading, one might expect "Patmos," written three years after "Rousseau," to reaffirm the traditional conception of prophesy as the ecstatic revelation of that which will find its fulfillment in a future time. Yet while a close reading of this poem, which is far more complex than "Rousseau" and has been the subject of enormous scholarly debate, goes beyond the scope of this present paper, a cursory glance at the last words of the poem – words that do in fact seem to bring the poem to an end – suggest that precisely here, in a poem which begins by remarking on the difficulty of grasping God despite his proximity ("Nah is / Und schwer zu fassen der Got"), the philological will have the last word (GSA 2: 165):

... der Vater aber liebt,
 Der über allen waltet,
 Am meisten, daß gepflegt werde
 Der veste Buchstab, und bestehendes gut
 Gedeutet. Dem folgt deutscher Gesang. (GSA 2: 172)

But could the philological really have the last word? Can philology last? In the present time, as Michael Holquist observes, philology is widely regarded as being moribund if not dead. This is only confirmed by the many calls in the last decades for its revival, starting with Paul de Man's 1982 essay "The Return of Philology" (269). And indeed, now more than ever, one hears the call not only for its revival but its radicalization. For John Hamilton, philology can even claim a kind of political and social urgency: security, he argues, is an urgent problem, and it is a problem that must be approached philologically (12). If philology, this

urgency notwithstanding, sits so uneasily with the present, it is perhaps not just because *this* present doesn't have the time or the patience for it, or because it has exhausted its purpose, but because the philological is always of essence untimely. Or as Werner Hamacher puts it, in a text that itself will have much to say about Hölderlin: "To be able to speak means to be able to speak beyond everything that has been spoken and means never to be able to speak enough. The agent of this 'beyond' and of this 'never-enough' is philology. Philology: transcending without transcendence" (25).

The last definition captures the challenge of Hölderlin's poetics: he is always transcending, always speaking beyond what has been spoken, opening up a new horizon for thinking and saying. Yet as much as it might tempt us, this beyond must not be taken as a transcendence that has already been achieved, and that, coming before all things, could offer itself as an absolute ground. Hölderlin is not the exemplary modern, secular poet-prophet, not a seer who will lead us beyond by speaking from the beyond. Rather, his poetry takes place at the limit at which, with the infinite imbrolios of language, philology touches and befriends prophetic discourse, and, by complicating it without end, holds open its promise.

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